

# TOUGH MONKEYS

## **Buckmore Park Winter Man of Steel Round 2: 16/12/07**

I'll be brief with this report, as I've been very slack and not written it for quite some time after the race. After the triumph of the previous night I went into this event feeling confident that I could push for a podium finish, yet knew that no matter what the result I would leave Buckmore after a busy weekend happy with my winners trophy from the Team of Steel the night before.

My confident feelings began to slowly fade, pick up speed and disappear completely as drivers began signing in prior to briefing. I'd been expecting my main rivals for the evening to be last year's champion Jack Harding and Pro champion Steve Brown Jnr. Si Rudd wasn't expected to race, but he turned up shortly after Jack and I had and he was talked into fetching his kit and coming out to play. There was an owner/driver meeting going on prior to the Man of Steel event, and a number of them came over after their event and were also convinced enough to have a play myself. Drivers such as Ollie Varner and Josh Webster would ensure that chances of taking home any more trophies would be remote. Last month's winner and 2-hour team mate Miguel Morland was also expecting to do well and I think we both were hoping to show these young 'un's a thing or two.

Qualifying resulted in a better than expected position on the grid. I'd been dismayed at the lack of grip from the kart, finding that the freezing conditions were causing havoc at a number of corners that only 24 hours earlier I'd been flying around. As it transpired, everyone else was having the same issues too so my kart's lack of pace was being hidden for the moment. I was to begin the race in 7<sup>th</sup> place out of 35, something that I was quietly amazed about to be honest. I really thought I was off the pace and was pleasantly surprised. Si had broken his golden rule never to change a kart that appears slow, instead drive around the problems, but felt that his machine was just far too poor even for him to tease anything out of it. As such he was down in 17<sup>th</sup>...I don't think he knew the grid went that far back! Result of the session was surely Miggins who was 4<sup>th</sup> on the grid behind Ollie, Jack and Josh. As a small aside, I look now at the top ten in qualifying and find a fascinating detail. Ten drivers, all lightweight and all under twenty years of age except for Mig and myself. I don't actually know how old Mig is, but I imagine he's well into his thirties and I'm about to join that club in 2008. I don't know if it's middle age spread but most of us older drivers are in the heavyweight category, and those that sneak into the lightweight pack are up against the pace, stamina and bravery of youth. It's a challenge, but it's bloody good fun too!

The race for me was a bit of a nightmare sadly. I was left with nowhere to go at HP2 on the first lap and in trying not to hit anyone under braking I spun around to face a wall of karts heading towards me. I was hit by someone which actually spun me right back around and I only lost a handful of places. It set the tone though for the rest of the race. I rarely went up the rankings, but often went backwards. I seemed to be able to keep pace with the whippets in front (sadly, Mig went backwards quickly with a handful of dodgy karts, having to change twice and never getting anything decent) but I had no speed on the straights to pass back markers or even gain positions. The problem for me, as it was for everyone on the night, was that the conditions were freezing. While the procession of 35 karts was keeping the racing line dry, moving off line resulted in a near certain spin. For the lightweights this wasn't a massive problem as they could nip by on the straights, but I couldn't do that. As such I was suffering heavily with every backmarker I came up against.

I was also to suffer my first almost-crash for a long time in karting at the hands of one of the lower order drivers. I came out of Garda behind a driver who went very wide and went off onto the grasscrete heading to Senna. I was expecting him to slow down before getting back onto the track so was a little surprised when he T-boned me as I passed launching me onto the icy outer reaches of the tarmac at about 40mph and in the direction of the tyre wall. Whether or not I was going to hit it was a decision that was out of my hands, but moments before impact I was able to stand on the brake and turn the kart so it slid sideways into the tyre wall. It was a hell of an impact, but because I was pointing in the right direction I was on the throttle and back on track before the water that was gathered in the tyres was able to drown me.

That would pretty much be it for my race though. Little more was to happen save for Jack, Ollie, Aaron Stapleton and Si to lap me shortly before the end and finish their races in that order. I crossed the line in a disappointing 12<sup>th</sup> place, but as I said before I was still buzzing from the night before. It would turn into a late night at the track too. As the clubhouse slowly cleared after the prize giving it was myself, race director Alan, Will Thorling, and Aaron and his dad stood chatting at the bar till a time that I'm normally approaching getting home to Derby. Always a pleasure to gas to Alan, so I was saddened to learn that Alan had suffered an accident that resulted in a broken ankle only a few days ago. As the Buckmore community have already crawled out of their New Year's drunkenness and said it, I'll reiterate the message of "Get well soon Al".